Voices of Israel: A Study of Modern Hebrew Poetry

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the project is to identify recently emerged, lesser-known voices in Hebrew poetry from groups that have been on the periphery of canonical Hebrew literature. The results from this research will ideally be incorporated into a course material anthology (for UPenn internal use only) for Professor Gold's course *Voices of Israel*. Aiming to combine individual mentorship and classroom teaching, Professor Gold initiated this project in order to update and reimagine the course with current marginalized voices in mind. This research focuses on poems written originally in Hebrew that have preferably also been translated into English, so that the poetry is teachable to an American university audience.

Corresponding with experts in the field, both in the U.S. and in Israel, is essential to the success of this enedeavor. Through this project, we strive to be more informed of some of the artists who are making a new and meaningful impact on Israeli literature and society.

BACKGROUND

To quote the description of this course as it was last taught, "[t]his course (Voices of Israel) will listen and respond to previously suppressed Israeli literary and cinematic expressions of "others," such as new immigrants, women, Arabs, gays... and those of Middle Eastern descent. Their varied voices, which deviate from the central narrative, were not allowed to be heard in Israeli culture until the late 20th century...The Zionist super-narrative dominated Israeli literature and film at its inception. Authors and directors were predominantly Israeli-born (or educated), Ashkenazi (of European descent) males who tackled the nationalistic, territory-based aspirations of the people. Now that the "periphery" has invaded the "center," a cacophony of voices and a kaleidoscope of images, replaces the mainstream ideological search for a Zionist utopia."

My experience taking two Hebrew literature classes with Professor Gold left me yearning to delve further into this field and I am thankful that our classroom relationship inspired this research project.

OBJECTIVES

- Research current Hebrew poets and their poetry
- Identify interesting literary magazines and poetry groups that emerged in recent years
- Define new categories of authors
- Deepen understanding of the art of translation and the decisions that govern when something gets translated and what linguistic and stylistic changes are made
- Become more familiar with searching through library stacks and lexicons

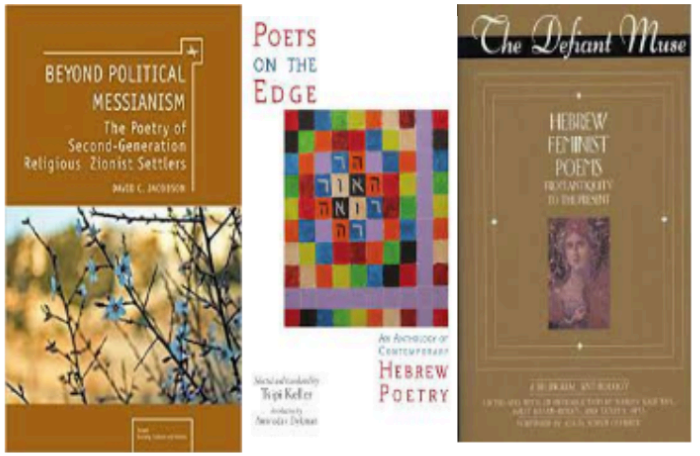
RESULTS

- An annotated 160+ page compilation of poetry from this century in Hebrew with English translations and accompanying bibliographical and contextual material; these materials will likely be incorporated in the course taught in Spring 2022.
- A document with detailed notes from several interviews and meetings conducted with poets, translators and poetry scholars.
- A working document of poems in Hebrew (some with English translations and some without) from the 1980s and 1990s from new or underrepresented groups, including women poets and gay poets.

METHODS

- Meetings with and connections through Professor Gold
- Reading poetry anthologies and searching lexicons
- Calling Israeli bookstores
- Zooms and phone calls with poets, poetry scholars and translators in Israel
- Watching recordings from poetry readings in Israel
- Looking through Franklin library online and Van Pelt library in person

The stacks at Van Pelt Library



Anthologies used to aid research and develop course

Almog Behar (left), Tehila Hakimi (center), and Amichai Chasson (right)

Three poets, involved with the popular group of poets who come from North African or Western Asian descent , "Ars Poetica," who I corresponded with via email or zoom.

Logos of Zoom (left), Whatsapp (center) and Facebook (right)
These relatively modern advances in technology proved crucial in the research. Zoom was used as a tool to personally connect with poets in addition to being the primary medium for poetry readings during this pandemic. Whatsapp was used to communicate effectively with people in Israel. Facebook today is one of the most effective modes of publishing and discussing poetry in Israel. Many bookstores post on Facebook a poem a day, as do individual poets or poetry groups.